

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE B-24NEW YORK TIMES
10 DECEMBER 1980

Notes on People

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Colby Defends C.I.A., but Also Concedes Its Flaws

Assuring his audience that he was "not a cloak-and-dagger man showing only the cloak and not the dagger," William E. Colby, the former Director of Central Intelligence, lifted the cloak a bit Monday night at a free-wheeling "dialogue meeting" of the Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York.

According to an infiltrator at the meeting, in a not-so-secret upper room at Rosoff's restaurant, Mr. Colby was both candid and disarming as he defended the need for a secret intelligence agency. He fielded spirited challenges from such civil libertarians as Prof. Paul Lehmann of the Princeton Theological Seminary and Algernon D. Black, head of the Ethical Culture Society.

When Corliss Lamont, the philosopher, recalled that he had won both damages and an apology after suing

the C.I.A. for opening mail he had sent his wife from Moscow, Mr. Colby said that the practice had stopped and that he had been against it all along.

Conceding that "we did a lot of things wrong," Mr. Colby provided reassurance of sorts when he said the "stupidest" thing the C.I.A. had ever done was to enlist organized-crime figures in an effort to kill Cuba's President Fidel Castro: "You couldn't find a more inept crowd than the Mafia," he said.